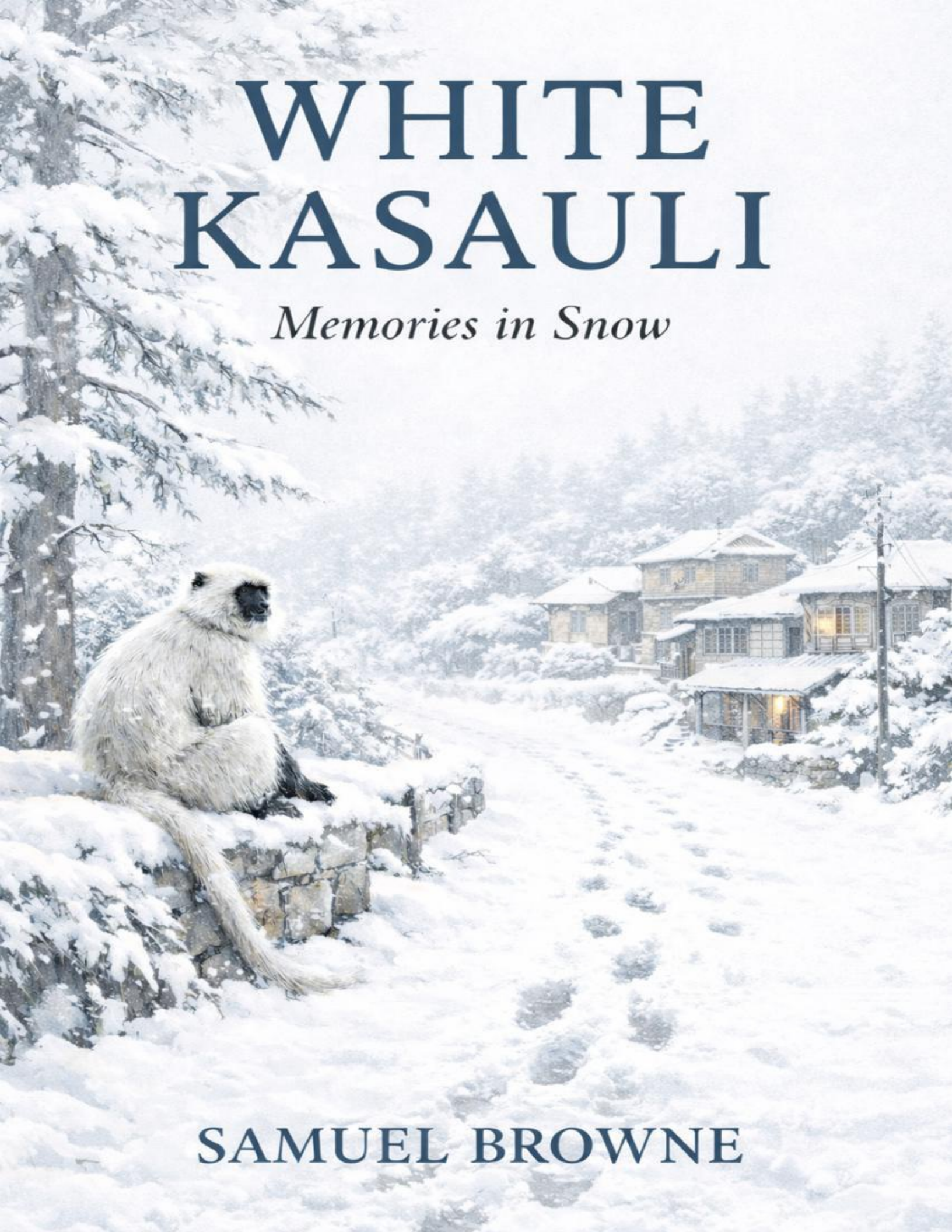
WHITE KASAULI

Memories in Snow



SAMUEL BROWNE

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Memories in the Snow

By Samuel Browne

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This book is a work of memoir and reflection. Names, events, places, and locations are drawn from memory and are used to evoke a time, place, and lived experience rather than to document or verify them as historical, institutional, or official record. Descriptions of weather, landscapes, and seasonal life reflect how they were experienced and remembered during the period described.

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The cover artwork is an imaginative interpretation of Kasauli, created using AI tools under the author’s direction. It is not intended as a photographic depiction.

Dedication

To my wife, born of Kasauli’s breeze and pine-scented paths; to my parents, mentors, elders, and all who shaped the quiet rhythms of our early years. And to Kasauli in winter—when snow softened rooftops, silenced the pines, and turned familiar roads and footpaths into landscapes of wonder.

We were children of those white mornings—watching snow fall without sound, tracing footsteps along hushed lanes, warming our hands by glowing fires, and learning stillness from the hills themselves. The town slowed under its winter blanket, and in that pause, we found closeness, warmth, and a joy that belonged only to that season.

Disclaimer

This book is a work of personal recollection by the author, based on childhood memories of winter life in Kasauli during the 1960s and 1970s. Descriptions of snowfall, weather conditions, homes, roads, paths, institutions, and daily life reflect how they existed and were experienced during that period.

Certain events, practices, and seasonal details are presented as remembered or as understood through lived experience and community memory. Over time, many places, names, and environmental conditions may have changed in appearance, use, or character.

While care has been taken to present these recollections faithfully, this narrative is not intended to serve as an official historical, scientific, meteorological, or legal record. Its purpose is to preserve the atmosphere, emotions, and lived experience of winter in Kasauli as personally remembered by the author.

This is not a story told from beginning to end. It is a return—to winter, to silence, and to the quieter memories that surface when life slows down.

Preface

“There are winters that never melt — they live on in memory.”

Each winter in Kasauli carried its own quiet rhythm — snow that arrived on time, as if keeping a promise. We never needed a forecast; the sky itself foretold it. The air grew still, the pines darkened, and somewhere deep within, we knew — tomorrow the world would turn white.

I remember those mornings when everything glistened — rooftops, railings, and pine needles wrapped in frost. The hills looked untouched, the world freshly created. Fires burned in every home; the smell of pinewood drifted through the lanes. People greeted each other with the warmth that only cold weather can bring.

White Kasauli is a walk back into those winters — into the calm, the laughter, the school holidays, and the small rituals that made snow a celebration. It isn’t merely about the weather; it’s about how the town and its people came alive with every flake that fell.

These reflections are a tribute to a time when life in the hills moved slowly, predictably, and with grace — a time when snow was not just seen, but felt, lived, and remembered.

Prelude: Step Into White Kasauli (1960s–70s)

November 1959. I was seven days old when my parents carried me up into the hills from *Delhi*— wrapped in layers of wool, tiny hands hidden in mittens knitted by Mother. That winter came heavy and sure, laying six inches or more of snow over *Kasauli*. Roofs, railings, and pines vanished beneath white silence. Even the air seemed new—thin, sharp, and scented with resin and frost. Footprints that marked the path at dusk disappeared by dawn; the world awoke clean again, hushed beneath its glistening quilt.

Inside, fireplaces crackled and the smell of burning pinewood filled the rooms. The Victorian architecture showed everywhere—high roofs, long verandas, stone floors that held the cold. We lived in the Sanatorium quarters, houses built by the British in Kasauli, sturdy against winter winds and mist.

Woollens softened the chill inside; dogs padded through the house, tails wagging, claws tapping lightly on stone. Outside, langurs huddled on snow-laden branches, grey bodies wrapped in their own fur coats, waiting for the sun. And above us, in the stables near *Drumbar*, the horses stood still in the white morning, their breath rising like smoke into the frozen air.

This was not the Kasauli of tourists and traffic, but a slower, gentler world where snow fell on time and the seasons kept their rhythm. Each lane, each slope, held its own whisper of adventure, laughter, and wonder.

Even today, I remain fascinated by snow—the way it transforms everything into quiet beauty, God's own handiwork of peace and perfection. No two snowflakes are ever the same, each one a tiny, delicate masterpiece—shaped like flowers, crafted by the *Creator's* own design. The purest form of water, descending gently from heaven.

Perhaps that first winter shaped something deep within me — a love for silence, for mountains, for stillness. In later years, I devoured books on the *Himalayas* and *Mount Everest,* imagining the fierce winds, the lonely summits, and the courage it takes to climb higher into the cold. Somewhere in those pages, I was searching for the same stillness I had known as a child — the stillness of Kasauli under snow.

It also gave me a quiet sense of adventure — the desire to overcome, to push through the cold, to find warmth and meaning in the climb itself.

Step carefully now, and let the snow carry you back—to the *White Kasauli*

that shaped my earliest memories and whose hush still lingers in the heart.
“*Where the snow always came on time, and the memories never melted.*”

CHAPTER ONE

The Kasauli We Knew

Kasauli, for me, has always been more than just a hill town. It was a world unto itself—a world where I grew to be a teenager; every season had its own rhythm, where mornings were veiled in mist and afternoons smelled of pine, and where evenings carried the soft echo of our laughter across the hills. Among all seasons, winter held a magic unparalleled. The first snowfall, crisp and delicate, would transform the familiar landscape into a land of wonder and adventure.

This memoir is a journey through those white days and nights, where snowflakes were not just frozen drops of water, but invitations to thrill, joy, mischief, and discovery. It is a chapter of memory, of wonder, and of the pure, unrestrained joy that comes from living amidst mountains, snow, and nature's quiet grandeur.

Kasauli: My Childhood Hill Town

I was raised in Kasauli from *1959 to 1975*—a city seemingly closed to the world, perched quietly on a green hill in the foothills of the Himalayas. A few mountain ranges away lay *Shimla*, the old summer capital of the *British*, where echoes of colonial pomp lingered. But Kasauli had its own rhythm, its own quiet charm, and I grew up immersed in it.

Adjusting to Change

The town was still adjusting to change. Though the British had long departed, their influence lingered — in the orderliness of the streets, the trimmed hedges, and the spick-and-span cottages that stood like echoes of another time. Some English families were still there, living quietly in their old bungalows, their gardens neat and their routines unchanged. The local people, the *Paharis*, were shy and reserved, keeping to themselves, often watching outsiders with wary eyes. But easy to get along once befriended.

Family and Early Life

My mother served in the *Lady Linlithgow TB sanatorium (LLS)* built by the British, and my father was an official in the *Cantonment Board*, also in charge of the city's sanitation. From the day I was born, Kasauli was my world, my playground, my classroom until eighth grade; these narrow lanes,

pine-scented walks, and misty mornings were my universe.

Whenever people of the old days met, they always remembered life in Kasauli as royal life.

A City of Quiet Distinction

Kasauli was a town of quiet distinction. I still remember the senior *Army officers, doctors, scientists, celebrities,* and *famous authors* who lived here—people whose very presence lent the place a rarefied air. They shaped its culture gently but unmistakably, giving the hills a sense of refinement, a gentry-like elegance that set Kasauli apart from other mountain towns.

Yet at its heart were the humble *Pahari* people—gentle, unhurried, and never imposing. They blended easily with everyone, their warmth and simplicity woven into the very fabric of Kasauli life. Their ways, their soft dialect, and their quiet courtesy gave the town its enduring soul. Their culture, their food, and their manner of living gradually seeped into the life of the city itself—simple, genuine, and grounded.

Many held senior positions, while others worked in homes as maids and helpers. The *ammas* cooked for us, cared for us when our parents were away, and kept the rhythm of daily life steady. The farmers, too, with their toil and earth-stained hands, sustained the town. From the hills they brought grains, kookri—the local maize—and the beloved pahari cucumber that grew in almost every home kitchen garden. Small pimples dotted its skin, much like a prickly pear, and its taste was distinctly different—tonally unlike the cucumbers that came from the plains. Along with other vegetables, these harvests nourished every home.

Life here often felt like living out a scene from a movie set—graceful, dignified, and beautifully ordered. There was an air of integrity about people, a quiet courtesy that showed in how they spoke and carried themselves. Clothes were well-pressed, manners were impeccable, and even the simplest outing had a sense of occasion. Cars moved slowly and neatly along the narrow roads, giving way with polite discipline and paying attention to every signboard. My favourite one—the one I remember even today—read simply: *“Give way to uphill traffic.”*

Apart from the market, families grew their own vegetables, and food was natural and fresh—drawn from nearby gardens and some local diaries. The air was crisp, the water pure, and the climate kind to both body and spirit.

As children, we watched the elders closely—how they dressed, greeted one another, and carried themselves with quiet confidence. We learned more by watching than by being taught, and in our own small ways, tried to follow their example. Their grace and discipline became part of us, shaping how we grew and how we saw the world.

Today, many from Kasauli have risen to senior positions, both within the country and across the world.

Streets, Houses, and Pine-Scented Air

Before the first snowfall arrived, the town was immaculate—quiet, ordered, and beautifully kept.

Roads were well-tarred and clean, bordered with neat parapets and low iron railings. Along the roadsides, trimmed bushes and stone walls lent a sense of symmetry and order. Houses had sloping tin roofs, walls built from carved granite stones, and the classic British aesthetic of red and green roofs. Lamp posts, solid iron red-coloured pillar mailboxes, and an old-fashioned bus stop marked the town's pace, while the market with cobbled stone lanes stood as the beating heart of Kasauli life. Pine trees framed every street and lane, their fragrance mingling with the crisp mountain air.

From these quiet lanes, the *Upper and Lower Mall* stretched like the town's spine, guiding life along its edges and giving both locals and visitors a view of Kasauli's rhythm and the mountains beyond. All this made Kasauli a hill station unlike any other—orderly, elegant, and quietly alive.

Upper Mall and Lower Mall

On the Upper Mall, the railings offered sweeping views of the mountains, their jagged peaks softened by the haze of distance. A *pointer,* perched atop a stone pillar, bore the names of Himalayan ranges and peaks etched into iron, while *sundials* and *rain gauges* quietly measured time and rainfall, marking the slow, steady passage of the seasons. The pine-scented air was crisp, carrying a hint of frost even in early winter, and the cold wind tugged at scarves and mittens. Snow sometimes dusted the railings, clinging to corners in sparkling crystals, catching the sunlight in tiny glimmers.

The irony of it all was that we had it entirely to ourselves. Kasauli, deliberately closed to the outside world, remained largely unpublicized—a secret stitched into the hills. Few tourists ventured here, and the town's quiet rhythm belonged only to those who lived within it. The cobbled stones

beneath our feet whispered with each step, distant chimneys puffed soft clouds of smoke, and sunlight glinted off the tin roofs, flashing across the valley below. Should snow arrive, the Malls transformed into a private world, where every gust of wind, every crunch of snow, and every distant echo belonged solely to Kasauli's children.

From here, the plains of Chandigarh stretched far below, and in winter, the horizon turned a brilliant orange, as if the sun itself was dipping into fire. Shops and cafes were sparse, yet each held a personality, charm, and a sense of history.

Down below, the Lower Mall moved at a slower rhythm. Stone parapets lined the paths, and locals gathered there, exchanging stories and greetings. Children played freely, their laughter echoing in the crisp air, gloves damp and scarves trailing like banners. A few cautious tourists wandered through, enjoying pony rides, but Kasauli remained mostly closed to outsiders, a town self-contained, a class apart in the foothills of the Himalayas.

Hand-pulled rickshaws, large and sturdy, ran from the bus stop under normal conditions, men straining against cobbles to ferry passengers up to the Upper Mall and down to the Lower Mall. Wooden shafts scraped rhythmically against stone, leather harnesses creaked—a human heartbeat for the town—but under snow, they lay resting, silent, their usual labour suspended by the whiteness. Snow had settled on the rickshaw seats and shafts, turning them into frozen sculptures, waiting for spring.

Winter and the First Snowfall

And then there was winter. In December, when the first snowfall arrived, the town seemed to pause. Sometimes, it would even snow in late November—light, fleeting flakes that hinted at the deeper winter soon to follow. The pine trees became heavy with white, roofs turned silver, and smoke drifted lazily from chimneys as if marking the season. Snow covered the Upper Mall in a delicate blanket; the Lower Mall became a playground for footprints, for snowballs, and for the gleeful laughter of children. The cold was sharp, biting, yet exhilarating, and the sight of snow settling silently over Kasauli made the world feel hushed, magical, and free. Tiny snowflakes caught in the pine needles, sparkling with each gust of wind, and the faint crunch underfoot seemed louder against the soft white hush.

The *fire-hose outlets* coiled neatly against walls, and the *iron-red mailboxes*

on the road sides—now half buried under snow—stood like sentinels along the lanes, each detail etched sharply against the whiteness. The mountains beyond, usually bold and defined, blurred into soft white silhouettes. Over Chandigarh, the horizon dissolved into a pale silver glow.

Even the sundials and rain gauges carried a delicate dusting of snow, their old metal surfaces catching the weak light like tiny mirrors. Footsteps crunched steadily along frozen paths as early risers ventured out, leaving fleeting patterns on the snow—marks the mountain winds would soon erase.

Early Memories

I first arrived in Kasauli as a baby—cradled in my parents' arms, unaware that these hills would one day become the backdrop of my earliest dreams and deepest affections. The pine-scented breeze, the distant whistle of a train echoing through the nearby hills, and the soft chiming of church bells in the market slowly settled into the rhythm of my growing world.

But I came to truly know Kasauli in the late 1960s, when I was a young growing up teen. Even now, the memory of those years—the scent of pine needles, the echo of footsteps on cobbled stones, the gentle bustle of the Market, the visits to the Upper and Lower Malls, and the soft hush of the first snowfall—remains etched in my mind, a portrait of a town both timeless and alive. I still remember our playful afternoons at the Sanatorium campus and the *Woodcot grounds,* where laughter echoed as freely as the mountain wind.

CHAPTER TWO

Winter Line Is Forming

November meant winter vacations, and my life moved between two hills—Kasauli and Mussoorie. At boarding school in Mussoorie, small paper calendars were pinned to our blazers or cardigans, —tiny squares of hope to tear away, one by one. Each day removed brought the winter line closer, and my heart leapt at the thought of going home.

In our overcoats, we could see *Dehra Dun* stretching far below from the school grounds, bathed in the fading light of evening. As the sun dipped into hues of orange and gold, we sang softly through our woollen scarves, *"The winter line is forming—we go home bye…"* A quiet thrill ran through me—a mingling of emotions: the sadness of parting from friends and school, and the joy of returning home to familiar faces and warmth.

At last, the day came. We boarded the train to *Ambala*—blankets, trunks, keys around our necks attached to a string, and laughter filling the compartments. My father would be waiting at the station, and together we'd drive up the winding road to Kasauli in his jeep.

The next morning brought familiar faces—my pahari friends and neighbours climbing up the path, grinning from ear to ear. Kasauli welcomed me as if I had never been away. Mother called from the veranda, laughing as she told me to go and hug them. We fell into each other like lost pieces returning to their place—warm, breathless, happy to belong again.

Braving the Cold

It was only when the real chill of November set in that I finally gave in to wearing warm clothes — mostly because my parents insisted. Till then, I moved about in just a shirt and *terricot* pants, pretending not to feel the sting of the wind. Most of my Pahari friends from the village below, who played with me every evening, were barefoot. The cold didn't seem to bother them, and somehow, their courage rubbed off on me too.

In spite of my running nose and shivering hands, I enjoyed the freshness of the cold. There was something pure and invigorating about it — unlike the cold of the plains that crept into your bones. The mountain air felt alive, brisk and honest, as though it carried the very breath of the hills themselves.

When Frost Took Over

Each early morning, Kasauli awoke beneath a delicate white spell. A thin layer of frost covered everything—rooftops, railings, pine needles, and blades of grass that glimmered like crushed glass in the first light. The dew had frozen overnight, turning the hill side and slopes into shimmering fields of silver.

Even the water refused to flow. The pipes, cold and silent, had frozen solid during the night. My mother would call out, *"Go light the fire!"* I would hurry out, breath puffing in the chill, and kneel beside the main joint with firewood and paper ready. As the paper and wood caught fire, tiny crackles broke the stillness, and slowly—wonderfully—the water began to flow again, gurgling, alive, and warm against the cold air.

The fire's warmth felt heavenly on my hands. I would linger there, watching the flames dance and smoke rise into the still morning air, until Mother's voice drifted again through the cold—soft but firm, carrying across the quiet hills—*"Come back inside, or you'll catch a cold."*

Those frosty mornings taught me to wake up early and get out of bed, even when every part of me longed to stay under the blankets. They showed me that warmth must sometimes be kindled, and that even what seems frozen will, in time, find its way back to life. And in that slow return of warmth, the hills themselves seemed to breathe again.

CHAPTER THREE

The First Snow Fall

Then came the first snowfall without warning. One day the sky would hang low and still, the next, soft flakes would begin to drift down, slow and uncertain at first — like feathers set loose in the wind. I remember the strange silence that came with it; even the birds seemed to pause mid-flight.

I'd rush out to the veranda, watching flakes settle on railings, rooftops, and pine needles, turning everything white within minutes. Even the black tarred road outside the house disappeared under the snowfall — now a soft white ribbon, clean and new.

The world changed before my eyes. Familiar paths grew gentle and blurred, footsteps softened, and the air felt muffled, as if the mountains themselves were speaking in whispers. Every sound seemed distant — even the rustle of trees came like a memory through the falling white.

It was magical, almost holy — as though the town itself had bowed its head in reverence beneath the falling snow.

The winter line was invisible now as snowfall and clouds covered the horizon as night fell, and I lay cocooned in blankets, listening to the wind sweep down from the mountains. Each gust whispered the promise of frost, of snowflakes settling silently on rooftops and pine trees. My mind wandered, imagining the first touch of snow on the cold earth, the crisp smell of winter air, the soft hush that always followed the first flakes.

And then, almost as if the mountains themselves had kept a secret until now, it began.

Tiny specks of white danced down from the sky, fragile as feathers, glittering under the weak glow of the street lamps. I pressed my face to the windowpane, breath fogging the glass, and watched the world transform. Roofs, pine branches, the dry paths below the sanatorium—all were coated in a delicate blanket of white, quiet and pure. The first snow of the season had arrived, just as it always did—precise and magical.

Outside, Kasauli held its breath. The wind carried the faint sound of cracking twigs under the weight of snow. The air was cold, sharper now, scented with pine and frost. Each flake settled softly, a whisper from the heavens, until the

world became white, silent, suspended in time.

I could hardly contain the thrill. Boots on, woollens pulled tight, I stepped out into the snow, each footfall leaving a crisp imprint in the pristine carpet. The crunch of freshly fallen snow beneath me, the cold settling into fingers and cheeks—it was exhilarating, a celebration of winter itself.

Then the voices began.

One shout carried up from the house below at Wood Cot — bright with surprise.

Another echoed from near the Nurses' Hostel — clear and laughing through the white.

A third rose from the main road above our home — sharp, excited, impossible to miss.

We answered one another, voices stitching across snowfall like threads of joy — not calling for anything, just sharing the wonder of it. Soon enough we were running to meet, footsteps crossing, merging, disappearing into the same soft white — the snow bringing us together long before we ever reached each other.

This was the magic of December, the crown of winter: the first snow. The long wait, the anticipation, the fires, the winter line—all had led to this. And now, the mountains gleamed white, the sanatorium shrouded in quiet wonder, and the night was silent, holy, and perfect.

The Silent Night

We huddled indoors, wrapped in the warmth of a fire-heated room, waiting for the snowfall that would soon grace Kasauli. It was always on December 24, at the stroke of midnight—the same hour every year—that the first flakes would begin to fall. It became a white *December 25, Christmas*—the birth of Christ. Outside, the world grew still and silent, as if the mountains themselves were holding their breath in wonder.

Suddenly, the holy night carol rang in my ears:

"Silent night, holy night. All is calm, and all is bright. Round yon virgin, mother and child. Holy infant, so tender and mild. Sleep in heavenly peace… sleep, sleep in heavenly, heavenly peace."

The lines seemed to echo in the stillness of the night, blending with the hush

of the falling snow.

Inside, the fire glowed steady and warm; outside, Kasauli slept under a white quilt and blanket. The night was truly silent, truly holy—one of those moments when even time seemed to pause.

I remember feeling something beyond the cold or the beauty of the snow—a stillness that touched the heart. It was as if heaven had drawn close that night, watching over every rooftop, every pine, every flicker of light. I didn't understand it then, but in that quiet, something sacred stirred—a peace that felt alive, breathing softly through the hills.

The snow kept falling, slow and gentle, wrapping the whole of Kasauli in grace.

Stepping Out Into the Night

We creaked open the heavy wooden door, and a rush of icy air swept in, prickling our cheeks and fingertips. The cold stung our noses, and the powdery snow dusted our hair and coats. Across the street, the light spilled softly through the darkness onto the snow outside. It looked like a blanket, each flake catching the glow and shimmering as if lit from within—as though the mountains themselves had started their quiet, magical dance.

The first step onto the soft dry snow produced a gentle crunch, breaking the silence in the softest, most satisfying way. Every sense was alive—the icy air, the faint pine aroma, the hushed hiss of the falling snow, the glimmer of light on white flakes, and the soft crunch beneath our feet. Kasauli, in that moment, felt suspended between heaven and earth, and we were fortunate witnesses to its timeless magic.

The Cascade of Snow

Then, suddenly, the volume of snowflakes increased. Visibility dropped almost to nothing. It was as if a white, snowy curtain had been drawn over Kasauli. All was still and silent, except for the soft, persistent hiss —"*sssssssssssss…*"—of the fresh snowflakes touching the ground.

The flakes floated down as if someone were emptying bags of cotton from the sky—soft, dry, and icy—brushing gently against the woods, the jungles, and the rooftops around us. We could hold them in our outstretched hands, catching the falling softness as it drifted from above. Darkness wrapped the hills, yet each flake glimmered—caught in the veranda light or flickering in

the beam of an old *Eveready torch*. A black night had turned white; every shadow softened, every contour blurred, as the world disappeared into snow.

The snow fell in a cascade, a silent symphony, transforming the world. Trillions of flakes hit the ground, making that gentle, hissing sound —"*sssssssssssss.*"

"Yeah!" we screamed into the night, exhilarated to witness a true white night. Our houses were poles apart, so our shouts disturbed no one—pure, unbridled joy in the frozen night.

Midnight Snowfall

Snowfall at midnight on the 25th of December was no surprise for us, growing up in Kasauli in the 60s and 70s. We timed our watches, and at exactly 12 AM—bingo—the lull would come. No breeze. No leaf moving. All still. Then, as the second hand ticked, the heavens opened. Cotton-like snowflakes began their descent, slowly at first, then heavier, blanketing the entire town.

Each early morning, Kasauli awoke beneath a delicate white spell. A thin layer of frost covered everything—rooftops, railings, pine needles, and blades of grass that glimmered like crushed glass in the first light. The dew had frozen overnight, turning the hillsides and slopes into shimmering fields of silver. And then, when the real snow arrived, the transformation deepened. The first flakes melted on contact, cooling the ground, and soon the layer thickened. By morning, roads, rooftops, trees—everything—lay under a soft white blanket. We rushed out in jackets, windcheaters, gloves, and monkey caps. The snow was soft yet crunchy in our hands, and Kasauli appeared reborn—every inch of the town, every tree, every roof covered in white. Birds had vanished, hidden in hollows or flown away; parrots tucked themselves silently into old pine trunks; the town grew still, broken only by our laughter and the crisp sound of footprints carving fresh paths through the deep snow. The pine cones, wood, and coal stored up in November would now be brought out to warm the fires.

CHAPTER FOUR

Kasauli Under Snow

I remember the winter when Kasauli turned white.

The same slopes where we had once run in sunlight lay silent under snow, every familiar corner transformed. Roofs, railings, paths, and pine ridges—all wrapped in a hush that seemed to slow time itself. The air was sharper, the light thinner, and even sound moved differently. The town, always gentle in its rhythm, now seemed to pause—its heart still beating, but softly, beneath the whiteness.

Upper and Lower Mall

Kasauli had two main divisions.

Life revolved around the Upper Mall and the Lower Mall—places almost "out of bounds" for many outsiders. On the Upper Mall, one could walk along the railings, with sweeping views of the mountains beyond on one side. A pointer, built atop a stone platform, bore the names of Himalayan ranges and peaks etched onto an iron disk.

During snowfall, the platform would be brushed free so the outlines could still be glimpsed—*Shimla* faintly visible on the horizon, frozen beneath the whiteness. On the Upper Mall, the railings gleamed silver in the weak sunlight. The *old pointer,* with its iron disk etched with the names of Himalayan peaks, lay overlaid with fresh snowfall. Sometimes, we brushed the snow off just enough to read the names again—white Shimla lay faintly on the horizon, its outline blurred under a hard, snowy glare. The winds sweeping across the ridge were cold and dry, carrying the bite of open slopes and the sting of drifting snow. The air felt stripped of scent and colour—just whiteness, stillness, and the sharp touch of winter moving across the hills.

Sundials and rainwater gauges, once used to mark the passage of time and measure rainfall, now lay inert beneath snow — quiet reminders of a town paused, but not forgotten. Below us, the plains of Chandigarh stretched wide and far. Even in winter, the horizon burned orange at sunset, the sun dipping into a fire-like glow behind the muted hills. The cold wind sliced sharp and clean through the air, carrying the dry breath of frost and that stark, crystalline clarity only winter brings.

Snow clung to the railings and the platform edges, sparkling in tiny crystals wherever sunlight touched it. Pine needles bent under the weight of fresh snow, glinting like shards of glass. Every step on the snow-laden paths left a crisp white imprint, only to be slowly covered again by drifting flakes.

Down below, the Lower Mall moved at a slower rhythm. Stone parapets lined the paths where locals gathered, exchanging greetings and stories. Children, *pompom caps* snug on their heads, scurried and slipped on icy patches, their laughter ringing bright in the crisp air. Their gloves were wet, scarves trailing behind them like banners of colour.

A few cautious tourists wandered through, but Kasauli remained mostly closed to outsiders—a town self-contained, a class apart in the foothills of the Himalayas. *Hand-pulled rickshaws*—large and sturdy—ran from the bus stop under normal conditions, men straining against the cobbles to ferry passengers up to the Upper Mall and down again to the Lower. Wooden shafts scraped rhythmically against stone, leather harnesses creaked—a human heartbeat for the town. But under snow, they lay resting, silent, their usual labour suspended by the whiteness.

Snow had settled on the hand-rickshaw seats and shafts, turning them into frozen sculptures waiting for spring. The men who drove them were indoors, warming themselves by their fires. A few drifting flakes landed on the stiff leather, melting slowly into tiny beads of water.

The Market

The market, normally tidy and alive, wore a hush in the snow. Shops stood closed, sanitation under my father's watchful eyes ensuring cleanliness even in winter, while the narrow-cobbled lanes gleamed bright under a thick blanket of white. *Old iron letterboxes*, painted red, jutted out from the road sided, dusted with snow. Water outlets for firefighting poked through the frozen ground, silent sentinels.

On ordinary days, a hair-cut man would make house calls, vegetable shops and sweet shops would hum, and the man who sat, with snacks—*kabli channa, peanuts, or chips*—kept fire pots alight, warming and browning the nuts. We would buy with a *chavanni (25 paise)* or an *athanni (50 paise)*, the cone-shaped papers steaming lightly in their hands during our visit to the cinema and munch inside the hall.

The cinema, a short walk from the market, came alive on weekends; the old

projector rumbled and whirred, casting flickering images across the screen while the scent of pine and wood smoke drifted in from outside. But now, with snow blanketing the town, vendors stayed indoors, the biting cold silencing trade, and even the cinema's warmth and noise lay surrendered to the stillness of white.

Life Amid Snow

The town, so familiar under the sun, was transformed. Roofs glinted white, the few cars lay hidden under snow, and the church—its spire capped in frost—looked like something from a Christmas card, its white steeple reflected faintly in the stillness. Stained-glass windows caught the weak sunlight, scattering tiny coloured fragments across the snow. Wooden doors creaked as the wind shifted, and the sound carried through the air like a gentle heartbeat. Footsteps crunched sharply on paths hardened by ice, and every sound—the rustle of pine branches, a lone birdcall, the scuff of boots—was magnified in the hush.

Snowflakes drifted lazily, clinging to gloves, scarves, and the shafts of hand-pulled rickshaws, settling in delicate, fleeting patterns before vanishing into the cold.

I braved myself to walk to the *pointer platform* on the Upper Mall, brushing snow from the etched peaks on the dial to glimpse mountains far away. Shimla and its ranges appeared faint and frozen under the whiteness, and the sun made the snow sparkle like tiny crystals. *Churdhar* peak (*Churi-Chandni Dhar)* was white under snow. Children slipped and slid, gloves damp, scarves trailing, laughing as they tried to balance on the frozen paths. Tourists, few and cautious, paused to marvel at the panorama, their voices careful, almost reverent.

Under the snow, normal life rested. *Hand Rickshaws, vendors, sundials, rain gauges, the cinema* and the popular *hooter* at the bus stop —all instruments of the town's rhythm—paused, silent beneath the icy blanket. And yet, Kasauli's pulse remained: soft, steady, and hidden beneath the brightness, waiting for the warmth of spring to stir it awake again.

In that stillness, time seemed to fold upon itself. Every roof and pine branch whispered of winters past, of laughter and warmth tucked safely indoors. Beneath the white quiet, life waited—patient, enduring—knowing that even snow would one day melt into memory.

CHAPTER FIVE

Our House Under Snow

Our house, a part of the TB Sanatorium then, stood firm on the hillside, built of solid stone with sloping belt roofs left by the British, designed to endure both heavy rain and snow. After the recent snowfall—*six to ten inches* blanketing roofs, railings, and surrounding pines—the tin roofs glimmered faintly under the overcast sky, reflecting a soft, grey-white light that filled every corner with a quiet stillness. Twigs and pine needles lay pressed into the fresh snow, creating delicate crystalline patterns across the yard. Inside, sturdy wooden beams held the roof, keeping the cold at bay, while simple whitewashed rooms were warmed by the polished glow of teak furniture. Thick woollen rugs lay across floors, heavy curtains blocked drafts at the windows, and warm clothing—sweaters, woollen scarves, mittens—hung ready, waiting for the next venture outside.

All was white except the tree trunks, the house walls, and the light poles.

Some of the electric wires carried heavy snow on them—looked like snowy cables running across the roads.

In those moments, when silence wrapped around the hills and even the wind seemed hushed, the whole town felt suspended in time. Every flake that fell seemed to slow the world just a little more—until all that remained was the soft glow of memory and the faint hum of life beneath the snow, waiting to wake again.

From the windows, we noticed the *langurs* were missing. The trees outside stood heavily snow-laden, silent and still. The langurs had migrated below to the lower hills and would return only after the snow. Their absence, and their silent struggle for survival, reminded me of the forest pressing close—of life persisting even in harshness—and made the warmth of our house feel like a small miracle.

The temperature gauge hanging by the door caught our attention; the mercury had slipped below zero. Each falling degree sharpened the contrast between the warmth inside and the cold waiting beyond the threshold.

By morning, the house road had disappeared. Snow lay thick and unbroken, smoothing the slope that led past Mother’s office and down toward the

sanatorium. What had been a familiar path was now only a white guess.

I pulled on woollen socks, then heavy gumboots—stiff, cold, reluctant. A coat, a cap pulled low. Outside, the silence was immediate and complete. No birds. No voices. Only the faint creak of snow settling.

The spade bit into the crust with a dry crack. The shovel followed, scraping, lifting, pushing. Each movement burned the arms; each breath came out in pale bursts. Snow hissed and slid aside, piling up along the edges as a narrow path slowly revealed itself—dark earth cutting through white.

By evening, legs ached and shoulders sagged. By morning, it was gone.

Fresh snow had fallen overnight, soft and merciless, erasing every step, every effort. The road lay smooth again, untouched, as if no one had ever passed that way. We dressed once more, took up the spade and shovel, and began again—learning early that in the hills, winter never remembers yesterday.

Fireplaces became the heart of the house during the snow. Coal, pine logs, and kindling were stacked neatly, ready for the evening ritual. Shadows danced across walls as flames crackled, filling the rooms with warmth, light, and motion. Sitting close, I felt the heat seep into my numb fingers and toes —a relief beyond description. Feet stiff and frozen from the icy floors, the gentle touch of warmth from the fireplace was a cocoon of comfort unlike anything the other seasons offered. Thick woollens, paired with the radiant heat, made the space feel snug, intimate, and alive. Each breath carried the scent of burning pine, mingling with the faint aroma of polished teak. Doors and glass-paned windows opened onto the snow-laden pine air, offering softened views of the distant valley, the outlines of eagles perched silently atop branches, adding to the hushed, reverent stillness outside.

The veranda, wrapped in white, embraced the house in a soft, cold mantle. Roses, bent beneath the weight of snow, peeked through with stubborn colour —pink, yellow, red—shimmering faintly in the muted light. Rainwater troughs and gutters glittered with icy edges, and the front road below lay hidden under pristine snow, muffling every sound. The snow refracted the pale light, turning the surroundings into a luminous landscape where every stone, railing, and bush seemed alive.

Our Sanctuary in Winter

The *TB Sanatorium,* further down the hillside, lay transformed. Its *wards, Wood Cot cricket grounds,* and *orchards* were silent beneath a heavy blanket

of snow. Even the distant Garkhal settlements seemed hushed, their rooftops glowing softly in the muted light, as though time itself had slowed. No vehicles moved on the roads; the whole valley felt paused between breath and silence. The main water tanks of the town's supply, and the brewery below, were all coated white, blending into the landscape like part of the hillside itself. Footprints in the snow—a rare trace of movement—hinted at human presence, faint and momentary. From indoors, I could watch smoke rise gently from chimneys, curling over the white slopes, a quiet sign of warmth and life within the homes below.

Amidst it all, our house remained my sanctuary — a warm, lively heart in the cold stillness. Thick woollens and blankets wrapped us in comfort against the biting air, while fireplaces blazed, filling rooms with a snug, enveloping heat that made the winter outside feel far away. The creak of floors, the soft yellow glow of lamps, and the flicker of firelight etched themselves into memory.

Inside, my little world waited.

My pedal car, the small jeep I drove around the yard, my bicycle, and the wooden toy train from *Lakkar Bazaar* in Simla — all kept indoors now, lined up like old friends sheltering from the snow. They rested more than played, silent yet present, pieces of my childhood staying close through the winter.

Indoors, warmth and life continued — lessons learned, stories shared, laughter rising like flame. And each time I looked out at the shimmering white world, or reached toward the fire for heat, or pulled a woollen close, I knew I was storing away memories of a season unlike any other — a winter that held both hush and heart.

Through our windows, I could see the *Drumbar grounds* lying still under a pale winter light—once lively with grazing horses, now quiet, their hoofprints faint on the frosted grass. Monkey caps, woollen gloves stitched by Mother, mufflers, and gumboots became our armour as we ventured out briefly before rushing back into the comforting warmth of home.

View from Our Window

Winter had a way of stilling everything—sound, movement, even thought. Mornings began quietly, with standing by the window and simply looking, as if the world outside had paused just for us.

From our windows, the Drumbar horse stables stood clearly in view, their

wooden beams lightly dusted with snow, roofs bent under the fresh white weight. The horses stood patiently, breathing out small clouds that drifted and vanished, their hooves leaving marks that soon froze and disappeared. To the left below stood the nurses' hostel of the sanatorium, and below it, the old wood-cot quarters and the ground where we played cricket—paths softened by snow, everything hushed, thin threads of smoke rising from chimneys into the cold, still air.

The whole scene seemed suspended in silence, as though time itself had stopped for winter. Indoors, our home remained warm and alive, the fire crackling softly as we watched the white world beyond our windows.

Footprints in the Snow

I stepped cautiously onto the snow-covered cobbles, each foot sinking slightly into the thick, unbroken white. Every step took time, measured, careful—I could not risk slipping. The snow had already been packed in some places by a lone passerby, gumboots leaving deep impressions, and I planted my own small feet alongside them, brushing off the loose snow that clung stubbornly to my woollens.

Sometimes those prints were Mother's — small gum-boot marks leading toward the Sanatorium. I often placed my own feet inside hers, wanting to walk where she had walked.

But sometimes there was only one trail, a single line of footprints etched into fresh snow, leading down the road and turning out of sight. One set, alone — crisp, unbroken — as if someone had walked quietly before the world woke. I would pause and wonder who it was. A neighbour? A worker from the hospital? Or simply someone who loved snow enough to step into it before anyone else?

In winter, Kasauli did not need crowds or conversation — footprints spoke for people. Every mark had a direction, a weight, a story, and I read them the way others read letters. A deep print meant heavy boots; a light scatter meant hurry or excitement. Bird tracks darted like scribbles. Dog paws made flowers. But the lone human trail was the most mysterious — a life passing through silence, noticed only in snow.

Kasauli lay utterly still. Not a bird called, not an animal stirred. The pines, rooftops, and cobbled lanes vanished beneath a uniform layer of snow. The forest that normally hummed with life was hushed, the greenery hidden under

sheets of white. Occasionally, a heavy layer slipped from the pine branches above, letting out an eerie, whistling sigh that broke the silence for a fleeting moment.

The air pressed against my cheeks, sharp and brittle. No wind softened it; no sun warmed it. The snow glared pale and harsh, forcing my eyes to squint, lids lowering instinctively. Each breath tasted of ice and pine, suspended in the still air. At night, the streetlights lent the snow an ethereal glow—a dark, muted white that felt both magical and strange, almost as if the world itself had paused, holding its breath.

Some mornings I searched for leopard pugmarks—the milkman had spoken of a few seen near the Wood Cot below.

Alongside them were the lighter, hurried tracings of crows and small birds—tiny arrow-shaped marks and scattered skitters across the fresh snow, like messages left behind.

I kicked at drifts that clung stubbornly to my boots, tiny plumes of white erupting and falling back into place. Each careful step crunched underfoot, echoing softly through the empty lanes.

Reaching home at last, I brushed the snow from my woollens, my cheeks tingling with cold and excitement. The warmth of the house, the crackle of the fire, and the scent of pine mingled with wet wool, wrapping around me like a gentle hug. Full from dinner and light in heart, I sank into bed, the fireplace warm and glowing at my side. The eight-legged spider on the wall above—always a quiet witness to our daily affairs—kept its still watch. Outside, Kasauli lay blanketed in white: silent, still, untouched—a world held in a perfect hush, waiting for another fall of snow to bring it alive again.

And in that silence, I felt time slow—moments of childhood warmth and wonder quietly settling into memory, like snow resting softly upon the earth.

CHAPTER SIX

Predicting Snowfall And Past Memories

During our stay in Kasauli, the only ways to track the weather were the radio or the daily newspaper—media was still in its infancy. But it was our own lived experience of the mountains that saved the day. By simply reading the clouds, feeling the wind on our cheeks, or noticing the crispness in the air, we could tell if drizzle, rain, or sleet was on its way.

Snowfall in Kasauli always fascinated me. The timing, the precision—it was uncanny. Every year, almost like clockwork, the heavens would open on the 25th of December, at subzero temperatures, and the snow would descend. Midnight. Exactly *12 AM* on the *24th* night—almost to the second. Was it a coincidence? I didn't know.

The climate, the rhythm of the seasons, the cycles of weather—they all seemed synchronized, almost humanly predictable. Rain or snow arrived exactly on time, year after year. Even when the snow fell slightly off schedule, it was never by more than a few hours. The mountains had their own calendar, and we had learned to read it.

A White Out

Snowfall meant everything stopped. *Offices, schools, and institutions* were already on winter vacation since November, and the bus stops and public transport came to a halt. The streets lay silent under a thick white blanket. Even the market stayed closed for the first few days.

It was a season of festivity, of pure joy. Spirits lifted, laughter rang out, and a playful energy filled the air. I was always the first to dash outside, eager to leave my footprints in the untouched snow outside our bungalow. We would crouch and scan the ground for tracks—birds, squirrels, or other small creatures that had passed before us.

At times the milkman from the village below brought startling news: a leopard had left its pawprints nearby. Leopards were common here. Some came close to our home, and we had lost a few dogs to them.

By then, a wide patch of clean white snow would already be spoiled—smudged with mud where a dog, having stepped through a muddy patch, had carried the dirt back onto the snow.

Native Animals In Winter

The langurs, Kasauli's native guardians, vanished when the snow thickened —only to return once the ice thinned and the leaves began to reappear. The cold never seemed to intimidate them. Often, we watched them shake the snow from their thick, furry coats, sending white flakes flying in all directions with a lively, agile jerk before trotting off into the whiteness.

Birds took refuge in the plains, returning only after the snow had melted. Squirrels, too, disappeared. Some burrowed into the hollows of tree trunks where their nests lay hidden; others slipped into crevices between walls and roofs. They survived patiently on the stores they had gathered before winter's arrival.

I often marvelled at the ants—their wisdom, their instinct. No leader to guide them, yet they toiled all summer, storing food, ensuring their survival. By winter, in the safety of the underground, they enjoyed the fruits of their labour. Yes, hard work in its due season always pays off.

The next morning, the milkman warned us of leopard footprints in the snow. They had crossed the path below the cottages in the night, silent and sure. Later, I discovered tiny trails too—fine, neat footprints of mice running across the white surface. Even in that frozen stillness, life went quietly on.

Snow Days — A Town Alive With Joy

During the day, the world outside transformed into one great playground. The whole of Kasauli seemed to come alive—children rushing out of homes, parents calling after them, neighbours greeting one another with wide smiles. Fresh snow united everyone in a shared excitement that felt almost magical.

Snowmen quickly took shape under our hands—rolls of fresh snow stacking into bodies, heads, and crooked smiles. Hats, sticks, and stones gave each one its own personality, standing proudly against the white. Along the lanes, other families did the same. A snowman stood here, another there—simple, uneven, and quietly joyful.

Then came the inevitable—snowballs, tightly packed, flying across the air. Children chased each other between pine trees, rolling behind parapets and ducking behind low stone walls. Screams, shouts, and laughter echoed through the still town, bouncing off rooftops and slipping through quiet alleys. Even adults joined in here and there—throwing a playful handful of snow or cheering from verandas.

And in the midst of all this, Mother returning back from Sanatorium after duty looked almost scenic. In her white cap, white sari, and dark blue over coat—the uniform she wore so gracefully—she walked home through the falling snow. I would always try a few volleys of snowballs at her, unable to resist. She pretended to dodge, half-smiling, half-scolding, but never truly wanting me to stop.

Joy surged in waves, mingling with the thrill of mischief and the small fear of slipping on icy patches. We rolled in the snow, tumbled into heaps, squealed, brushed flakes from our sleeves, then charged back again—determined to win the next snowball battle.

When the severe cold began to set in, we would rush back home and sit before the fireplace, letting the warmth thaw our fingers and cheeks.

By afternoon, when the light softened, the snow sparkled quietly once more. The echoes of our laughter lingered in the cold air, slowly fading into the stillness—like the town itself had smiled warmly for a while before settling back into calm, white silence.

Kasauli lay in pin-drop silence. Snow dropped softly from heavy pines, and the empty roads and market glowed faintly in the fading light. Somewhere in the forest, a distant rustle moved through the dark. The town slept under snow—quiet, untouched, and utterly still.

Snow Ball Battles – and the Watching Mountains

The snow was already there, settled thick over rooftops, pine branches, and cobbled streets. It stayed for a week or more before melting, and during that time one thing dominated everything—the WHITE. A colour so bright, so shiny, so glittery-white, that it almost hurt the eyes when the sun touched it. The ground, the trees, the roofs—every surface glowed as if lit from within. Nothing in Kasauli that week was anything but white upon white, a world washed clean in brilliance.

After a day or two, we finally stepped out with friends from the sanatorium and a few children from nearby homes, whose parents worked in other institutions around Kasauli. Greetings burst out at once—hands shaken, voices colliding, shouts of joy ringing across the bright white ground. The air bit at our cheeks, noses turned red, but none of it mattered. My heart raced with simple questions: how high we could pile the snow, how far a snowball would fly, and who would run the fastest.

We were bundled in colourful woollens—monkey caps pulled low over our ears, gloves clasping fingers, hi-boots stomping into the snow, long woollen socks tucked into thick boots, and long johns keeping our legs warm. The winter sunlight struck the icy crust, scattering tiny reflections everywhere—each one a shard of white light, each step sending up a soft spray of glittering white powder. Our laughter bounced off the silent slopes, carried easily in the blinding brightness all around.

Awe filled me as the mountains themselves glimmered white from ridge to ridge, their frozen slopes enchanting, magical—like a world held in pure, perfect WHITE. I could almost feel Kasauli leaning closer, the hills and trees standing as quiet spectators to our mischief, wrapped in their shimmering white cloak.

The Snowball Attack

I had accounts to settle. She was a strict, elderly nurse on the campus, forever pointing out my mistakes. That day, while the neighbours stayed snug indoors, I wandered alone in the snow. The world felt muffled—soft and white—rooftops, cobbled lanes, pine branches, all wrapped in silence.

Then I saw her. A lone figure moving slowly along the road below our house, heading toward the nurses' hostel. She wore her uniform: a white sari, white cap, and a blue overcoat against the cold. She had no idea I was watching, standing still and pretending I was about to walk down toward the water tanks beyond our house, already plotting.

The snow was brittle now, ice forming everywhere except where footsteps had melted it into slush. Walking elsewhere was a challenge, a delicate negotiation with gravity itself. I scooped up a handful of soft, fresh snow, packing it into a tight sphere. My mother's woollen gloves absorbed the cold as it soaked through, sending icy fire into my fingertips. But I was ready—ready for a prank, ready for revenge, ready to strike.

She was an elderly lady from the hospital; someone I knew well. In my mind, I became the Test team fast bowler, gripping the snowball like a cricket ball, wrist cocked for precision. The snowball left my hand, slicing through the frigid air.

Thud. A perfect hit. She screamed, startling a couple of bulbuls into flight. The snow had drenched the back of her sari and sent a chill down her spine.

"Here you! I saw you do it! Stop it … you naughty boy! When will you learn?

Oh … my … God! You wait and see … I am reporting this to your parents!"

Every word felt like my father's scolding amplified—a storm of authority and anger. I froze, heart hammering, caught between fear and guilt.

I remembered my parents' constant teaching: *"Go and ask forgiveness first, even if the other is at fault."* So, I did.

"I am so sorry, aunty," I whispered, voice trembling. *"I will not do it again!"*

I slunk home, head down, glancing nervously at every window. Every parent returning from work made my stomach twist. Surely the incident had been reported? Surely punishment awaited?

But, as always in Kasauli, time had its way. The snow melted, and with it, her anger thawed too.

Snow Alive Beneath Our Boots

The snow beneath our boots felt alive, whispering with each step, spreading our energy across the empty town. Kasauli watched, holding its breath with us—every pine and rooftop frozen in anticipation, every street a stage for our tiny dramas. Even the silent forest seemed to lean forward, eager to witness each snowball, each tumble, each squeal of delight.

Each morning, I would take a spade to clear the path in front of our house so that Mother could reach work on time. The air was sharp and still, our breaths rising like smoke in the pale light. The snow was light and easy when fresh, soft as sifted flour beneath the blade. But once it hardened into brittle ice, every strike of the spade rang out across the quiet hill, echoing faintly between cottages. I watched her walk down the cleared path, her footsteps fading toward the hospital through the white hush of morning.

The real danger came a week later, when the melting snow hardened into glassy ice. I've had my share of falling—and sometimes, from far away, a sudden scream told me someone else had too.

Mother still had to report for work. I could always tell when she returned by 4:30 p.m.—her boots making that familiar crunch on the ground. The same sound came from the milkman early in the morning. We could always tell who was approaching our house by the rhythm of their steps, trampling the snow beneath their boots.

During the day, the world outside transformed into one great playground. The whole of Kasauli seemed to come alive—children rushing out of homes,

parents calling after them, neighbours greeting one another with wide smiles. Fresh snow united everyone in a shared excitement that felt almost magical.

Most of our play stayed within the sanatorium complex. We knew the ground well—the slopes, the shortcuts, the narrow trails winding between buildings. It was familiar territory, our domain, where we moved with ease and confidence. We rarely went up toward the marketplace above our house, beyond Hawa Ghar. The climb was steep, the roads tiring, and there was little reason to go—everything we needed was already here.

Snowmen quickly took shape under our hands—rolls of fresh snow stacking into bodies, heads, and crooked smiles. Hats, sticks, and stones gave each one its own personality, standing proudly against the white. Along the lanes, other families did the same. A snowman stood here, another there—simple, uneven, and quietly joyful.

We would throw a snowball at anyone walking down the road below our house and then duck in quickly, stifling our giggles. Soon came the inevitable—snowballs, tightly packed, flying through the air. Children chased one another between pine trees, rolling behind parapets and ducking behind low stone walls. Screams, shouts, and laughter echoed through the still town, bouncing off rooftops and slipping through quiet alleys.

Waves of joy washed over us, stirred by mischief and the faint worry of losing balance on the ice. We plunged into the snow, collapsing into white mounds, laughing, brushing off flakes, and racing forward again—ready to conquer the next battle of flying snow.

By afternoon, when the light softened, the snow sparkled quietly once more. The echoes of our laughter lingered in the cold air, slowly fading into the stillness—as though the town itself had smiled for a while before settling back into calm, white silence.

Kasauli lay in pin-drop quiet. Snow slipped softly from heavy pines, and the empty roads and distant market glowed faintly in the fading light. Somewhere in the forest, a quiet rustle moved through the dark. The town slept under snow—untouched, hushed, and utterly still.

Where Pride Slipped

Staying upright was a matter of pride for us. A fall meant weakness. So, I walked a little straighter than needed, especially downhill, boots set firmly, confidence meant to be noticed.

I did it on purpose—to prove my manliness. A sportsman at school, a leader among the sanatorium children, I wanted them to see that snow and slope did not frighten me. I saw the patch of glassy ice ahead and walked straight into it, telling myself I would not fall.

The ice answered quietly.

My feet slid and there was a sharp, hollow crack as my back hit the frozen ground, the cold punching the breath out of me in one clean blow. For a moment I lay flat, staring at the white sky, ears ringing.

The first thing I did was turn my head, checking if anyone had seen. No one had. Relief came before pain.

The snow lay smooth and innocent, as if nothing had happened. That day, the hills taught me something I would remember—strength is not in proving yourself, but in knowing when not to.

Tasting the Snow – Mischief and Caution

Between battles, we couldn't resist tasting the fresh snow. I raised a handful to my mouth, the cold sharp against my tongue. My mother's warning echoed in my mind: *"Don't eat it, it's not good!"* Yet we couldn't help sneaking a lick, the pure snow melting sweetly on our lips. Loneliness sometimes flickered in my chest, as I noticed a friend standing apart for a moment, hesitant. But the laughter and shared games quickly drew everyone back into the fold.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Curiosity, Awe, And Mountains

The mountains around us glimmered white, the pine trees weighed down with snow, sagging under its weight. Occasionally, a branch would release a sheet of snow, sending a muffled whistle through the air that made us jump and laugh. Birds had retreated, animals were nowhere in sight, and the town seemed entirely ours. Curiosity made me peek into corners where snow had drifted into unusual shapes; awe made me stop mid-step to watch the sunlight glinting off icy surfaces; fear made my heart beat faster when I nearly slipped; joy lifted me every time we collided in a snowball skirmish; and loneliness reminded me how small I was in this vast, white world.

I could feel Kasauli holding its breath with us, the silence outside punctuated only by our laughter. The snow seemed alive, glimmering, shifting under our feet, echoing our energy back to us. Every crunch of boots, every swoosh of snowballs, every muffled whistle from pine branches felt like a conversation between us and the town itself—a shared secret between children and the mountains.

From Frosted Breath to Blossoms in the Sun

One day I insisted that Mother take me to Pinjore. The first snow had fallen the day before—soft and hesitant, not yet the thick white blanket I longed for—but enough to make the van driver from the Sanatorium grumble at the very idea of travelling down the hill. After a few tears and stubborn pleading on my part, they finally agreed.

I watched as the driver knelt beside the tyres, fastening the heavy metal chains around them. The cold links clinked sharply against the rubber, the sound echoing in the still morning air. These chains, he said, kept the van from skidding on the icy road. We moved slowly at first, the crunch of metal biting into snow, until just after Garkhal—where winter simply ended. The road lay bare and dark. The driver stepped out, breathed into the cold once more, and removed the chains. The van felt suddenly light as we continued our descent.

And when we reached Pinjore, it was as though we had stepped into another world. The sun shone warmly, the plains below stretching out golden and dry.

The cold loosened its grip; warm air drifted in through the windows smelling faintly of eucalyptus and earth. We spent the day wandering in that gentle sunlight, laughing and exploring, as if the winter we'd left behind existed only in memory.

Standing there in Pinjore's gentle warmth, I looked up and saw Kasauli spread out like one unbroken mass of snow across the horizon. The ridge gleamed, pure and pale, with Monkey Point piercing the sky like a quiet sentinel. It felt unreal—that high, white world above us, and this warm, bright one where we stood.

By the time we returned home later that evening, the roads were exactly as we had left them—quiet, unchanged, untouched by any new snowfall.

The Walk Home – Exhausted but Happy

One day, I decided to give Mother a surprise. Children were not allowed near the Sanatorium, but that didn't stop me. She would always warn, "The doctor will find out!" Still, I set out quietly, walking past the big water tank—our summer cinema spot—and then down the slope, past the post office. The road curved gently, lined with snow-laden pines, leading toward the hospital below.

The Sanatorium lay still, half-buried in snow, its wards silent except for the faint creak of doors and the distant caw of a crow. I stood by the gate, waiting until Mother caught sight of me. Her eyes widened in surprise, and I could almost hear her unspoken sigh before it melted into a smile—half worried, half amused.

When her work was done, we started back together, climbing the long, slippery slope home. Snow clung to our mittens, boots, and caps. Each step left a deep mark in the white trail. With my hand in hers, I helped her navigate the difficult parts, steadying her as we brushed flakes from her shawl. The street lamps flickered halos over the glowing snow, and Kasauli felt suspended in stillness—hushed, luminous, and alive in the fading light.

Inside, warmth met us instantly. We shook off the snow, boots squeaking on the stone floor. The fire crackled, filling the room with that comforting smoke-and-pine scent. Mother poured warm milk, steam rising in soft curls, and I slipped quietly, cheeks flushed from the cold, proud to have walked her home through the snow.

The Silence Outside

The silence outside was absolute—no birds, no animals, no movement—only the snow's harsh, pale brilliance reflecting the faint lamplight. Inside, laughter and conversation drifted softly, the echoes of snowball fights and gleaming eyes from the afternoon lingering in the cozy glow. The day had ended, leaving only the gentle warmth of home, the sweetness of shared joy, and the quiet magic of Kasauli wrapped in white. Even in its stillness, the town seemed alive, as if remembering our footsteps, our laughter, our fleeting marks in the snow, keeping them tucked safely in its memory until the sun returned.

Remembering Mischief

Snowball fights came with small risks—wet socks, cold fingers, scoldings—but also with joy and shared adventure. Elders with sharp eyes were our "enemies," always ready to catch us. But the thrill, the laughter, the warmth of friendship, the awe of the mountains—all of it was ours. Kasauli, silent, white, magical, remembered it all, keeping our footprints, our laughter, our fleeting mischief tucked in the snow until the sun returned.

Lessons From Guidance

We were raised under the careful guidance of our seniors and mentors. They taught us to live consciously, to notice the world around us, and to be accountable and responsible. Faithfulness was instilled from the very beginning. We learned to honour and respect those deserving of it

Rules were not forced upon us. The environment encouraged observation, discernment, and choice. We were free to choose right from wrong—that is the essence of conscientious living. When the conscience—the faculty that separates good from bad—fails, confusion reigns, and we call right wrong, and wrong right.

Our mentors never forced lessons on us, yet their charisma drew us in. We wanted to emulate them. Gentle, well-mannered, hospitable, and upright—they led by example, and we followed, gladly.

Being children of officials made us highly visible. Any prank or misbehaviour could be reported, threatening the reputation our parents had built in Kasauli. Every action mattered. Every choice carried weight. Yet even with that constant awareness of being watched, the child within me refused to stay still. Rules and caution melted the moment snow began to fall.

The white world outside seemed to invite mischief, daring us to forget everything and just be children again—alive, laughing, unstoppable.

The Jump In Snow Dump

It was an unstoppable excitement. The cold in Kasauli could bite like a wild animal—sharp, merciless, and unrelenting—but it never once smothered the fire inside me. That fire burned brighter than the frost around us. The thrill of fresh snow, the zeal of being the first to stamp my footprints on a new white world, the sheer joy of it—it was unstoppable.

My shouts of delight rang out into the crisp mountain air, echoing louder than a cricket crowd's cheer when the ball sails over the fence for six. The cold clawed at my cheeks, but the magic of the moment always won.

Our parents would call from inside, warning us to stay put, but we slipped out anyway—silent, sneaky, and grinning—into the icy world beyond the door. It was the time when snow began to melt and the air turned like glass—sharp, clean, glinting in the pale winter sun.

After too long outside, my feet felt like blocks of ice, my fingers stiff and aching. We'd tear back indoors, fumbling at our gumboots, peeling off damp socks with clumsy, frozen fingers, and thrust our numb feet toward the heater or the fire. The sting of heat on frozen skin was agony at first, then bliss—a rush of relief so sharp it almost made me laugh.

The Ultimate Challenge

Among all our winter escapades, one stood apart—a test of pure daring, a leap that separated the bold from the timid. It wasn't just a game; it was a chance to prove myself, to taste bravery everyone would talk about.

At Wood Cot Cottage, perched above the *LLS campus* grounds, a high ledge overlooked a dump of shovelled snow. That dump was our landing pad, our white mattress. We'd leap from the ledge into thin, freezing air, trusting the snow to catch us.

I was next after my friend—he was my *"test jump."* Hiding behind him, I waited for my turn, my heart pounding so hard I thought everyone could hear it. My breath came out in warm clouds of vapor. Fifteen feet below lay the snow dump, dazzling and silent. What if it wasn't enough? What if I landed wrong?

My friend didn't hesitate. He leapt with the ease of a trained parachutist,

slicing through the crisp air, landing smooth and sure. He climbed out, shovelling snow back over the hole his body had left, and then looked up at me. All eyes turned toward me.

Every cell in my body screamed to step back, to stay safe. But that would be cowardice. And cowardice would spread faster than fire—across our cricket team, our hockey friends, the whole small world of the Sanatorium children. We were hill children—bold by nature. We feared neither animals nor heights, neither jungles nor mountain darkness. We climbed trees, ran wild, and the spirit of the mountains ran in us all.

And yet, the thrill tugged at me. This was my chance. My friend's face below glowed with triumph, waiting. We were the adventurous kind, after all—fearless of dark woods, wild animals, heights, or hair-raising escapades on Kasauli's hillsides.

If I made it, this jump would be legendary—a story retold and retold, a bright feather in my cap.

Walking The Talk

"You can't change what you can't face." That line pulsed in my head. This was my moment. A schoolboy, yes, but right now I had to stand like an adult.

So, I stepped forward.

One… two… three… I pushed off the ledge.

Fear vanished in the rush. The spirit of sportsmanship carried me as my body cut through the freezing air. My stomach flipped, butterflies swarming as the cold slapped my face.

Then—crash! A soft, muffled crash. Snow exploded around me in a powdery burst. For a heartbeat, everything stopped. Then the world roared back into sound and colour.

I was safe. No injuries. My friend rushed forward, laughing, cheering, his gloved hand reaching to pull me up.

Joy flooded through me, as sharp and sweet as the cold air. The snow was soft and deep; my feet sank with a satisfying crunch. A gaping hole marked where I'd landed. This felt even better than those hard choir mats we landed on after somersaulting off the gymnastic horse at Founder's Day at the boarding in Mussoorie.

I had done it. I had jumped. And in that moment—shivering, grinning, snow in my hair and victory in my chest—I felt ten feet tall.

The snow clung to my woollens, slid down my collar, and filled my boots, but I didn’t care. The laughter of my friends echoed around me, their cheers carried by the cold wind. For a few seconds, I was a hero in my own small world.

All my friends were experts at climbing trees, swinging from branches like monkeys. That was the only feat I avoided. I had no talent for climbing heights or balancing on uneven limbs. But that jump—into the soft, deep mound of snow—was mine. It was my moment of courage, my own kind of adventure.

As I looked around, breath misting in the crisp air, I realized courage didn’t always mean scaling trees or showing off. Sometimes it was about taking one bold leap, against hesitation, into something cold, uncertain, and thrilling—and coming up laughing.

CHAPTER EIGHT

What the Snow Taught Us

What surprises people most when I speak casually about my childhood is this:

I grew up in a place where winter arrived on time, snow was expected, and silence was part of everyday life.

Snow in Kasauli was never an event. It was a season. Roads disappeared overnight. Footprints vanished by morning. Roofs bowed under white weight, and the world slowed without asking permission. We did not wait for winter to pass; we lived inside it.

What often fascinates people is not the snow itself, but how naturally we adjusted to it. Fires were lit early. Water was carried with care. Woollens were layered with thought, not fashion. Voices softened. Movement slowed. When the snow fell heavily, life paused—not out of fear, but respect. The hills decided the pace.

We were never bored. We were attentive. A crack in ice, pine branches shedding snow, smoke rising straight up on still mornings—these were moments that mattered. Living like that teaches you something quietly: life does not need constant noise to feel full.

People are also surprised by how safe we felt as children. Not because there were no dangers—there were—but because awareness came early. Weather, animals, terrain, even silence itself were treated with respect. Curiosity was guided, not crushed.

What Kasauli gave us was not nostalgia, but balance. Between warmth and cold. Between movement and stillness. Between knowing when to act—and when to wait.

That lesson has stayed with me. And perhaps that is why, when I mention it in passing, it still surprises people: a quieter life can be a richer one.

CHAPTER NINE

A White Christmas Night in Kasauli (1960–1970)

Kasauli in winter was a hush in motion—a hill town wrapped in silence and pine-scented air. Smoke drifted slowly from chimneys, curling into the grey sky before vanishing into mist. The pines stood tall and motionless, their needles glistening with frost. Even the dogs barked less, as if the mountains themselves were waiting.

Between 1960 and 1970, the season here wasn't about bright lights or grand feasts. It was something softer—an unspoken joy, shared between people and the place they called home. It was the message of peace and goodwill among men:

Luke 2:14 — "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

Preparations at Home

The Christmas season began long before the day itself. The scent of ghee, sugar, and spices filled our house for days. My mother, in her woollen shawl, moved between the stove and the wooden table, making pakwaans—*gujjas* stuffed with *khoa* and *coconut, bajre ki tikkis,* and crisp doughnuts cooling on sheets of newspaper.

It was the season remembered as the time of Jesus' birth in Jerusalem, and down in the market the bakery ovens glowed late into the night, baking *rich plum cakes*—the kind that left a deep aroma in the air. Children waited eagerly for their share of crumbs, while fathers returned home carrying tins of cake wrapped in newspaper. Curtains were washed, glass jars shone, and the house took on a quiet brightness. Each window, by evening, glowed softly like a lamp of welcome.

The Watchnight Services

As December deepened, Kasauli turned colder by the day. Breath rose in misty clouds as people stepped out, wrapped in layers of wool—mufflers wound high, monkey caps pulled low, woollen gloves snug around chilled fingers, and heavy overcoats shielding against the mountain wind. The scent of pine and smoke lingered in the air, and the hills waited, hushed, for the holy night to come.

Luke 2:12–14 — "And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger…"

In our little hill town too, light flickered in windows, glowing behind frosted glass. Songs of hope and peace floated into the still winter night, mingling with the faint scent of pine and woodsmoke—the joy of a Saviour born that day. And as the days grew shorter and the evenings sharper, a quiet expectancy settled over the town.

The Sanatorium staff, their families, and neighbours came together, mufflers wound tight, torches in hand. A few lanterns swayed in the fog as the first carol rose into the night, followed by another familiar hymn and carol. The dholak kept rhythm, the tambourine chimed, and the harmonium wove its tune gently through the hush of the hills. The singers sang in unison, giving glory to God. The sound seemed to travel far, tumbling softly down the slopes into the snowy dark.

Each home waited for the singers—tea simmering on the stove, cups ready, a plate of pakwaan and plum cake on the side, baked lovingly for His birthday. The fireplace glowed at its peak, its warmth spilling into the room as voices rose outside in the cold night. Children peeped from behind curtains, smiling shyly as familiar faces appeared at the door. The carollers sang in English and Hindi, their breath turning to silver mist in the air. Sometimes, the group grew so large that it felt as though the entire lane had joined in. The music drifted across the valley—faint, tender, full of joy—before melting into the night, while the pines and deodars stood awake, listening, silent witnesses to the celebration.

It often continued till *2 a.m.* finally winding at the last houses near the Kasauli market. By the time we returned home, our boots left dark prints on the frosted paths. The lamps burned low, and the town slowly slipped back into sleep. Yet somewhere, in the stillness, a voice would softly hum *"O Come All Ye Faithful."*

And once more, Kasauli listened—quiet beneath the stars, until morning crept slowly over the pines.

A Night Waiting for Snow

The 24th arrived quietly. The day moved slower than usual. The hills wore a stillness that felt sacred. Families tidied up, and every now and then, someone would step outside to test the cold.

After dinner, we put on our woollen overalls, gloves, and boots. The air outside was sharp—it bit at our faces and made our ears burn—but the excitement of the night was stronger than the chill. Our eyes regularly checked the thermometer gauge. A few lanterns glowed in the lanes. Groups formed again, smaller this time, but more solemn. We began our walk, singing softly, our voices blending with the rustle of pine needles in the dark.

The Silent White Night

Then, all at once, everything went still. The wind stopped. The pines froze mid-whisper, and even the dogs fell silent.

The clock struck twelve.

And then, as if on cue, a single snowflake drifted down, catching the beam of a torchlight—followed by another, and another. Within moments, the air was full of them. It felt as though the sky itself had opened its arms.

We stopped singing. The first sound we heard was a faint hiss—*sssssssss*—of snow touching roofs, branches, and ground. The flakes fell thick and soft, glowing under the veranda light like white wool.

Someone began softly, *"Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright… Shepherds quake at the sight… Christ the Saviour is born…"* and the rest joined in. The words floated into the night, mingling with the falling snow.

Silent Night

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heav'nly hosts sing Alleluia;
Christ the Saviour is born,
Christ the Saviour is born.

Roads, rooftops, and trees disappeared beneath a white blanket. Torches pointed upward showed millions of flakes tumbling from the dark. The world had turned white. Even the fern trees, draped in snow, stood like festival trees gifted by nature herself.

We walked through the snow to the last house in the market, still singing—our breath rising in clouds, our feet crunching softly on the frozen road. By the time the song ended, the sky had become one vast white silence.

Back home, the poinsettias in the windows glowed red against the frost, as if

whispering peace and joy. That night, Kasauli slept under a cover of snow—still, white, and holy.

The carols faded, the lanterns dimmed, yet something lingered in the air—peace. The gifts beneath the evergreen tree were gone, given away as tokens of God's love—a sense that heaven had brushed past our little town.

Even now, when I think back, I remember that night—Kasauli silent under snow, and it felt as if heaven had come close to our little town.

Silent Snow

The next morning, the world lay changed—hushed beneath a thick white sheet. The town seemed reborn, every roof, railing, and cobbled street softened into gentle curves by the powdery snow. The pine branches bent low under its weight, their needles frosted with tiny, glinting crystals. Footprints from the night before had frozen in place, leading nowhere. Smoke rose lazily from chimneys, and the town stirred slowly awake—quieter, gentler, as if still holding its breath from the night of miracles.

The air was impossibly still, heavy with the scent of pine and cold earth. Unlike rain or sleet, which rattled and pattered against roofs, this snowfall moved silently, a gentle, soft whisper that touched everything it fell upon. Footprints of the previous day were erased, replaced by an unbroken carpet of white. The entire town felt paused, suspended in a quiet reverie.

I tiptoed outside, the snow cold and crisp under my socks, marvelling at how it clung to every surface, sparkling as the pale winter sun peeked over the horizon. Birds called softly from hidden nests, their delicate chirps echoing through the stillness. One chirp—like a sudden *"pop"*—drew my attention toward a spot on the camera box from the photographer, reminding me of our family portrait the week before.

Even the familiar cobbled streets of the market looked magical—each stone edged in white, glinting like frosted glass. The Upper and Lower Malls were silent; the few people who wandered moved slowly, leaving trails behind them, their breaths curling in little clouds. The snow had claimed the day, and everything else felt secondary.

I stood there, taking it all in—the hush, the glitter, the frozen perfection—and remembered my parents' words about seeing the wonder in every moment. In that silent, snowy morning, I understood fully. Childhood in Kasauli wasn't just about play or mischief—it was about noticing, feeling, and being present

in a world that could vanish in a single thaw.

When snow covered Kasauli, everything became slow. We had to walk carefully or we would fall. Mother told us to finish our work before dark, and we listened. We stayed closer to home, closer to each other. I learned to wait, to keep quiet, and to do small things properly. The cold stayed outside, but inside something grew steady, like a warm light that did not flicker.

Those quiet lessons stayed with me, even as the snow began to leave the hills.

CHAPTER TEN

Ending: White Kasauli

As the snow melted and the mountains settled into quiet, Kasauli slowly awakened from its white slumber. Footprints vanished, icy patches softened, and life slipped back into its familiar rhythm. Yet the memory of those winters—the thrill, the laughter, the daring adventures, the warmth of shared meals, the hush of snow falling silently over the hills—remained etched forever in my heart.

The birds returned, flitting about in search of their morning meal. Langurs sat high on the chestnut tree, cracking fresh nuts as the first shafts of sunshine broke through the mist. A squirrel squeaked sharply from a branch, warning of a wild mountain cat moving through the bushes. Parrots were back in the khadak trees, their green feathers flashing against the brown bark where sunlight warmed the trunks. And soon the familiar sounds of sparrows and crows filled the air again—the faithful companions of our everyday life.

The cold and wintry season was over, and a renewed vigour stirred in the air as the promise of spring—and all the life and colour it carried—approached. Winter had passed, but it left behind a peace that lingered long after the snow had melted—a quiet reminder that every season, like every moment in life, has its own beauty, and that even endings carry within them the promise of new beginnings.

When snow came, the town drew closer without being told. Doors stayed ajar a little longer. Someone always knew who hadn’t stepped out that morning. A kettle would be put on, a path cleared, a message passed along without words. We walked slower, spoke softer, waited more. In the hush of white days, Kasauli did not feel cut off—it felt held.

White Kasauli was more than snow. It was a classroom of courage, curiosity, and conscience. A stage for childhood bravado, a canvas for friendship and family, and a reminder that wonder often lies hidden in the simple, quiet moments of life. Even decades later, the scent of pine, the crunch of snow underfoot, and the hush of a snow-laden night take me back there, to that magical town where winter painted everything white—and left a lifetime of memories behind.

The old photo album was thick and sturdy, bound in coloured cardboard, its edges softly worn from years of turning. Each black page held photographs tucked neatly into cone-shaped paper corners, their edges gently curled with time. Many of them were taken by our town's photographer—the man with the box camera who captured Kasauli one careful click at a time, from his little shop above the main bus stop. As children, we believed him completely when he whispered that a bird lived inside that box and would come out any moment. The faces within—smiling families, winter picnics, quiet lanes, and misty hills—looked out as if still caught in the warmth of that moment.

Between the pages lay thin sheets of cellophane, slightly crinkled, whispering as they turned, keeping one memory from touching another. Sometimes, a faint scent of paper and old glue rose from within, as though the years themselves had been pressed between those transparent sheets.

To turn each page was to walk back through time—slowly, tenderly—one photograph at a time. And as I closed the album, I realized nothing was truly gone — the town, the carols, the laughter — all still lived somewhere between those pages and my heart.

Discover Kasauli Beyond the Snow

If the snowy hills and wintertime magic of old Kasauli have captured your heart, you might enjoy exploring the town in other ways:

> **KASAULI MEMORIES:** Growing Up Among Pines and Mountains – *A full-length memoir*. Experience daily life, childhood adventures, and the quiet warmth of the people who made the town home.
>
> **KASAULI: FOUR SEASONS –** *A short, reflective book*. Memories, seasons, and moments of the 60s & 70s, journeying through Kasauli's four seasons — from spring's first blooms to autumn's gentle golden light.

Together, these books offer a full embrace of Kasauli—its seasons, its people, and its timeless charm.

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About The Author

Samuel Browne spent his childhood in the Himalayan town of Kasauli, where pine forests, winding paths, and small communities shaped his earliest memories. A lover of storytelling and the quiet details of life, he writes to preserve the beauty of those years and the faith that guided them. He also teaches nutrition, health, and wellness—sharing simple, practical ways to live with strength, clarity, and longevity.

His Kasauli trilogy is a tribute to the hills that raised him and the timeless wonder of a childhood lived close to nature.

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